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Vignette: Brandon's Mill, Calloway County, Kentucky

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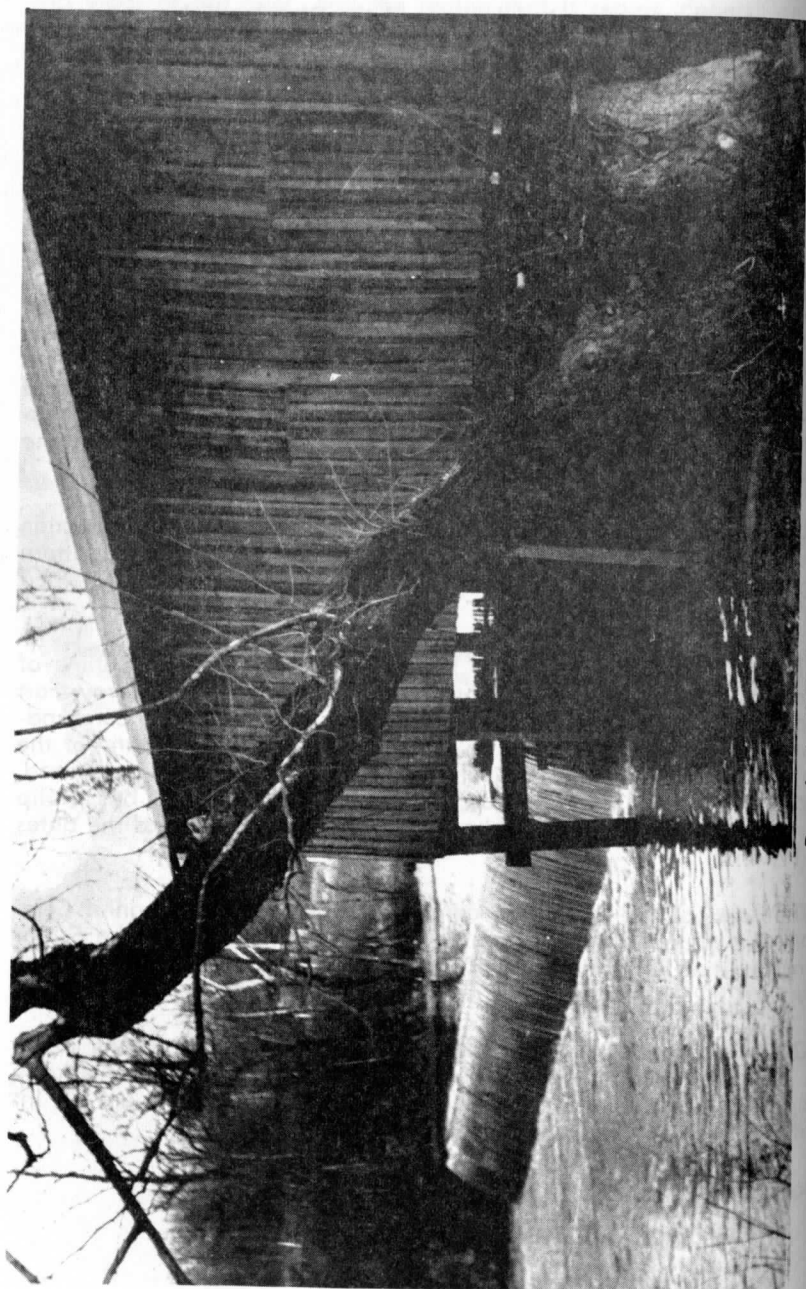
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Brandon's Mill, December 1940

as photographed by Ardath Canon, Murray, Kentucky
(reproduced from the original negative by courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. A. G. Canon)

Brandon's Mill, Calloway County, Kentucky

The author of this article makes no claim to being either an English scholar or historian, but wishes merely to put into print some of the history of Brandon's Mill as related by people who were associated with it or knew it well. Among these individuals were A. B. Beale (1848-1937), one of the oldest local inhabitants, founder of A. B. Beale Hardware Store, and uncle of the author, Galen Thurman, Jr., and his father Galen Thurman, Sr., a former owner of the Mill, and Mrs. Kelley Cromwell, sister of the author, who is a former reporter for the Paducah **Sun-Democrat**, Murray **Ledger and Times**, and radio station WNBS in Murray.

The accompanying picture is a copy of the original photograph as described in this article, and is provided through the courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. A. G. Canon.

Brandon's Mill was for almost one hundred and twenty-five years located about twelve miles south-east of Murray on Blood River. Its primary purpose was to grind wheat into flour and corn into meal for farmers and for public sale.

It was by pure chance that the mill structure and old tree were preserved in a photograph taken in December 1940. At that time Ardath Canon, of Murray, snapped a shot of the Mill, developed the negative, and stored it with a collection of negatives. After a few years, his wife had an urge to try to paint, and he was simultaneously bitten by the photography bug. From these two ailments came a number of 8" x 10" black and white enlargements of this original picture which were given to his friends who previously had lived near Brandon's Mill. Also, his wife sold several paintings depicting the photograph to former residents of that area. More and more people became interested in this picture until by now it has been copied by photographers, painters, and illustrators from Murray to St. Louis. The 1974 Bank of Murray calendar reproduces a later painting of the original photograph.

Following the Battle of New Orleans and the end of the War of 1812, Charles and Howard Brandon came home, and sometime later built a dam on Blood River to provide a source of water power. The first mill for grinding was built on the east side of Blood River. Later, a mill was built on the west side of the river and this remained the site for Brandon's Mill until the time came for Kentucky Lake to be filled.

The Brandons sold the Mill to the Mohundro family, who in turn sold it to the last owners, Galen Thurman, Sr., and his brother, R. H. Thurman, who was a Baptist preacher for many years.

This Mill drew trade for many miles, even far into the state of Tennessee, and was very busy. Farmers would haul their loads of wheat and corn to mill and at times they would have to wait for several days to get their grinding done.

A large frame hotel stood near the Mill and accommodated the farmers and the traveling public. For several years liquor was a legal commodity in that area, and many of the farmers enjoyed the days of waiting for their turn at the Mill. The Brandon brothers would hire the waiting farmers to haul rocks which were placed on sides of the banks of the river to prevent them from being washed away. The rocks were still serving their purpose when the Mill was torn down.

The Mill owners had a bucket called a "toll dish" that was used to measure the grain which was collected from the farmers' loads as pay for the grinding. The toll dish held one gallon of grain, which counted as one eighth of a bushel of grain. Galen Thurman, Jr., owns an original toll dish on which is inscribed a date of manufacture or purchase, April 17, 1820.

The Kentucky Legislature in 1834-35 appropriated two hundred dollars to be used to clean out Blood River. Jim Barrett was appointed to oversee this cleaning job. The river was cleaned from Brandon's Mill to its mouth at the Tennessee. Later, a boat was built to float a cotton gin from Brandon's Mill to the Tennessee River and up the Tennessee to Hamlin, Kentucky. This gin was located at Hamlin, but did not prove to be very satisfactory there and was floated back to Brandon's Mill about 1840. It and a sawmill were then established on the west side of Blood River.

Brandon's Mill fulfilled a vital need for area residents for well over a century. However, the filling of Kentucky Lake has caused Brandon's Mill to become no more than a memory for most of the residents of parts of Kentucky and Tennessee.

Velma Beale Canon